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Faculty Interview with C. Brian Rose

CONVERSATIONS



C. BRIAN ROSE

PROFESSOR OF CLASSICAL
STUDIES, JAMES B.
PRITCHARD PROFESSOR OF
ARCHAEOLOGY, AND
CURATOR-IN-CHARGE,
MEDITERRANEAN SECTION,
PENN MUSEUM

Discentes: What is your position within the Department of Classical Studies, and how does that relate to the Museum?

Professor C. Brian Rose: I have a joint appointment. I am the James B. Pritchard Professor of Mediterranean Archaeology in the Department of Classical Studies and Curator-in-Charge of the Mediterranean Section of the Penn Museum.

D: How long have you been at Penn, and what did you do before that?

CBR: I have been at Penn since 2005. Before that I taught for 18 years at the University of Cincinnati.

D: What is the current research project you're working on?

CBR: Well, I have been excavating and researching at Troy for the last 25 years, and I only recently finished all the publications relating to my fieldwork at Troy which started in 1988. So I have a large book on Troy, a synthetic overview of habitation at Troy from the Neolithic period to the Battle of Gallipoli, coming out in a couple weeks from Cambridge University Press. And then there are two other volumes I finished on the Troy excavations that will cover the material I excavated at the sanctuary dedicated to Cybele and the Samothracian gods and the Hellenistic and Roman houses in the lower city, the residential district of Troy. So my main fieldwork focus now is the site of Gordion in central Turkey about an hour's drive southwest of Ankara. It's been in the process of excavation and study by Penn since 1950. Last summer, I had an entire season of new excavation, the first excavation that's taken place at the site in seven years. We made a lot of wonderful discoveries dealing with the early and middle Phrygian stages of the site, the 9th, 8th, and 7th centuries BC.

D: How do you go about designing the research project? What goes into choosing a site?

CBR: Normally what happens is that you formulate a

hypothesis that you want to test by fieldwork at a particular site or in a particular area. That can be a surface survey, and it can also be an excavation with active fieldwork. You're digging in order to test the hypothesis that you formulated earlier in the year at Penn. In my case, the sites in essence came to me rather than me coming to the sites. This is the reverse of what one would normally do. When I was hired at the University of Cincinnati, just after finishing my PhD, my superiors told me early on in 1987 that I would be overseeing with one of my colleagues the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine excavations at Troy which were starting up again after a hiatus of 50 years. Cincinnati had excavated Troy in the 1930s—1932 to 1938—and so when Prof. Manfred Korfman of the University of Tübingen wanted to resume the excavations at Troy, he turned to Cincinnati for advice and with the offer of a partnership between our two universities. In other words, Troy sort of landed in my lap in 1987, and I thought, "Well this is fine, who wouldn't want to dig at Troy?" But it was a situation in which I had to formulate a research agenda for the site rather than first deciding on the research questions and then seeking permission to excavate the site. The same was true for Gordion. When I was hired at Penn, there was always the sense that eventually I would take over Gordion because the director was getting close to retirement age. This was a situation where I had to devise a research design to fit Gordion, of which I was now in the process of becoming director. I looked in particular at what had been done or not done since 1950—there were a lot of things I had done at Troy in the last 25 years, and I wanted to do the same sort of thing at Gordion. That meant creating a color-phase plan so that we could understand the successive settlements of the site and how the citadel developed over time. There's more information in that color-phase plan of Troy than you get from any other plan of the site. And I

wanted to try the same thing at Gordion. I also wanted to do a lot of remote sensing to try to get an idea of the city plan and how it changed over the years. I used a technique called magnetic perspection, also radar, and also a technique called electric resistivity. I was able to get a fairly good understanding of the defenses around the most important buildings of the citadel and in the surrounding area, and to determine what the residential district looked like. The excavation was targeted in two areas that would give me some answers to the questions the remote sensing had raised. I had put a hiatus on excavation seven years ago when I became co-director because the other archaeologists who had worked there for a very long time weren't publishing their discoveries fast enough, so I decided we shouldn't excavate for a while until more books came out. Six books came out in the last three years, and so I thought we could excavate now that the publication record was a little stronger.

D: How do you define classical studies?

CBR: Classical studies is a term that has come to acquire an increasingly broader definition over the course of the last few decades. Classical studies was initially focused on Greece, Italy, Turkey, and not so much the western Mediterranean. So it had a narrower spatial frame and a narrower temporal frame. People tended to focus on the period from the late 8th BC century of Homer and Hesiod through the foundation of Constantinople in the early 4th century AD. Now most Classics departments would include studies in the Bronze Age, starting around 3000 BC. Obviously we're a case in point as that's what my colleague Tom Tartaron studies. Many classics departments would extend their range of courses all the way to the end of the Byzantine period, so the middle of the 15th century AD. The geographical focus too has expanded, including Spain, North Africa, and all the way to Afghanistan, especially with the current wars. Those wars

focused attention more on the Greek material or Greek-inspired material culture of Afghanistan than had been the case before. So the spatial and temporal frames of classical studies have expanded dramatically as have the conceptual frames of classical studies. This is the byproduct of developments in women's studies, feminist theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory; that's given us a broader conceptual frame in which to analyze the literature and material culture of the Mediterranean in the 1st millennium BC to 1st millennium AD.

D: How do you see the field of archaeology evolving in the next fifty years?

CBR: You know, I should have a quick answer since I was President of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) for four years, until 2011. I suppose I would bring in the some of the issues I raised in the answer to your previous question. We need to be much more expansive in our approach. We need to cover the broader temporal and spatial dimensions much more aggressively than we have been doing. The discipline of archaeology needs to reach out to diverser audiences than it has been. We need to engage the public much more than we have been doing, and that's one of the great things about this museum. There's very advanced research in archaeology here, but we also have a strong public outreach program. We need to engage the children much more aggressively than we have been doing, and that's especially true for professors of archaeology. Many would prefer to teach university-level students which is easier than teaching children in primary or secondary school. But so much of what we're dealing with now is the preservation of cultural heritage and intolerance toward different kinds of cultural heritage. You have to reach the children before they're taught to hate a particular group of people or a culture so that, when they grow to adulthood, they will ideally have a more tolerant

attitude toward diverse cultures very different from their own. This has been a big problem in Afghanistan with the destruction of the colossal Buddhas in Bamiyan by the Taliban in 2001. That destruction was related to an intolerance of earlier cultures, so one of the things we have been doing at AIA is working with teachers in Afghanistan, and in the U.S., on new lesson plans that promote understanding of and respect for diverse cultural heritage for primary school students. To that outreach, I would include more of an interface with the military which is a program that I tried to promote while I was president-elect and then president of the AIA. It was a program that had once been in place during the World War II with the so-called “Monuments Men”. That was a time in which academics, archaeologists, classicists, art historians, historians worked with the military on identifying, conserving, and helping to repatriate art and antiquities that had been looted by the Nazis. That strong interface between academia and the military fell apart during the Vietnam War when a metaphorical wall was constructed between the two groups. The academics weren’t working with the military anymore; they were marching against them. Universities were closing down, classes were cancelled, students were leaving the university to become activists against the war in Vietnam. I had to try to put the original partnership back in place at the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which was not easy because I found that my colleagues didn’t trust the military, nor did the military trust us to be politically neutral in the lectures that I was proposing we would give at military bases throughout the US and—if they let me—Iraq and Afghanistan. They did ultimately let me do that although it took some time to get the program approved and organized and to convince my colleagues to do it. One subsidiary part of that was that, you know, everybody is busy. Most of my colleagues were classical archaeologists,

and they were worried about giving lectures on Iraq and Afghanistan, so I put together a lecture template for them with talking points. It was lot more involved than I realized it would be. One other difficulty was that even though I got the program approved by the U.S. Central Command, that didn't mean I had the approval to go to every base. I had to get permission from the base commanders to do that, and they would change every two or three years, so I had to reargue the merits of the program every time. I've been doing it for nine years and the briefings are diminishing now because the wars are winding down. The Iraq War is over; our forces will leave Afghanistan in 2014. What I hope is that someday, the U.S. Central Command and the Department of Defense will decide that cultural heritage sensitivity training should be mandatory for all soldiers. We're not there yet, but I'd like to think that is something that will happen in the next 10 years. Since the U.S. has ratified the Hague Convention which involves protection of cultural property that's at risk in zones of conflict, I think that this will play a role in ultimately prompting the Secretary of Defense to promote mandatory cultural heritage training.

D: What attracted you to archaeology within the larger fields of classical studies and art history?

CBR: When I was growing up in a rural part of southeastern Ohio, I was very bored, and so I looked for ways I could travel to another country at the earliest age possible, and the easiest way to do that, it seemed to me, was with AFS, American Field Service. When you apply to be an exchange student, you have to be willing to go anywhere in the world they decide to send you. So your horizons have to be broad and you have to be flexible, and as far as I was concerned, any place was fine because it wouldn't be southeastern Ohio. They sent me to Italy just by chance—this was in the summer of 1973, and at the tail end of the period when everyone was

interested in alternative lifestyles. We've sort of moved away from that since the 70s. The earlier exchange students had complained that they had only gone to the beach with their host families and drunk wine, and that was it. It wasn't a sufficiently rich cultural experience for them. That summer of '73—it was the only summer they did this—they picked ten of us who were slotted to go to Italy to live in a monastery in northern Italy with the monks. I wasn't in that group; otherwise, I might have taken up Medieval Latin, I guess. Another ten of us were selected to work on an excavation just outside of Cerveteri, north of Rome, for one month and then to dig a medieval site in Calabria in southern Italy for a month near a little town called Filadelfia, ironically. Then I decided that this was about the most interesting job I could imagine doing and I would try to do it—much to the chagrin of my parents because they said that I would never get a job and that it wouldn't pay. And so the best undergraduate major in Mediterranean archaeology was at Bryn Mawr College, and the only way I could major at an all-women's college was to go to Haverford which is what I did. Then I went to Columbia, got a PhD, and then I got a job at the University of Cincinnati just as I finished my PhD which put me in Troy. I had already worked in Turkey for five years during graduate school at the site of Aphrodisias, so I knew Turkish, and I knew something about what it was like to work in Turkey. Altogether, I've worked for 33 years in Turkey. It's not something I ever thought would go on quite this long, but it's become a kind of second home for me.

D: What is your favorite course to teach at Penn?

CBR: I love teaching Introduction to Mediterranean Archaeology because I don't get an opportunity to teach a lot of undergraduate classes. A lot of what I do is graduate. Because I have this joint appointment, my course load is 1-1 rather than 2-2 which is the normal course load.

D: What would you say is the most exciting discovery you've made?

CBR: I've made a lot of exciting discoveries—I've been very lucky in that respect. When I was digging at Aphrodisias in southwestern Turkey, the primary sanctuary site of Aphrodite in the eastern Mediterranean, other than Cyprus, I excavated a sanctuary of the early Roman emperors. In excavating that complex, I found between 50 and 75 life-size marble reliefs of the Julio-Claudian emperors and the Olympian gods. That was phenomenally exciting. It was exhausting—we were finding too many reliefs. The more sculpture I found, the more workmen the director gave me. You don't find that every day; I suspect that I'll never find it again. One of my most exciting discoveries at Troy was a series of lion bones that were from an Archaic stratum—so that would be 7th-6th century BC—that seemed to belong to lion skins that decorated the walls of the sanctuary which was almost certainly a sanctuary of Cybele, the mother goddess of Anatolia. We thought these were skins that might actually have been worn by the worshippers of Cybele during ritual activities, so that was pretty exciting.

D: Do you have any final remarks about the cultural heritage protection program you implemented in Iraq and Afghanistan?

CBR: I was worried initially that the soldiers wouldn't be interested in what I was talking about, and it was certainly a different lecture style that I had to master to do this. It's not like lecturing in a university—these were people who were going to be the guardians of that culture. So I had to teach them in a different way, stressing not just the importance of the monuments, but how to conserve them. In a sense, I had to teach them how to be a conservator; how to handle mud-brick architecture, what to do when they go into a museum that's just been hit with a rocket. Cultural property can vanish

immediately if you're not careful, so I needed to make them emergency responders in conservation, and I needed to do that in an hour or fifty minutes. And that was very hard. It was an entirely new way of thinking about teaching, and it was easier to do it in the field when I went to Iraq and Afghanistan. I could just point to the monuments and say, "If this happened, here's how you would handle it," or "Here's what you should do, and here's what you shouldn't do." I was never frightened in Iraq. I was frightened in Afghanistan, but you put it out of your mind. I mean, you're there to teach. But that was the first time fear entered my mind in an overseas setting because the Taliban were just down the road and even though I was wearing body armor, they could still have killed me instantly. But you learn how to put it out of your mind and move on with your appointed task. It wasn't as if I wasn't being protected—at one point I had 30 or 40 Afghan and U.S. Army soldiers around me—but it felt different. I don't know how to describe it. And it was heartbreaking. It was hard to teach because I could see the situation with the women in Afghanistan, the extent to which they had been deprived of literacy, and that was hard.

D: What advice would you give to students looking to pursue a career in archaeology or in classical studies in general?

CBR: The most important thing you can do is to learn as many languages as possible, as early as possible. And when you have children, when they're two or three, take them to a foreign country and live there for a year, because they'll become bilingual in a week—it will take you several years, but they'll become bilingual in a week. That's the kindest thing we could do to our children: take them overseas when they're young and expose them to a different culture and a different language. You can't know enough languages, and you can't really understand the hopes, desires, the fear, the anger of a different group of people unless you can converse

with them in their language. That's the most important thing you can do regardless of what branch of classical studies you choose to focus on.
